

ENOP

**EUROPEAN NETWORK OF ORGANISATIONAL AND WORK
PSYCHOLOGISTS**

NEWSLETTER NO. 29

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CONTENTS

1. Minutes of last meeting
2. Symposium 1995
3. ENOP presence at Gyor
4. Conferences
5. Workshops
6. Library Project
7. Research
8. Publications
9. Membership
10. Budget

1. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the Business meeting 1994 were read and were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting. Arising from that meeting and the symposium, Branimir Sverko pointed out that though all members had been asked to give a summary of their presentations, only a few had done so. He agreed to circulate all others asking for their summaries so that they could be included in the forthcoming newsletter.

Appreciation of his work as acting newsletter editor was expressed by CoCo. (Editors note: these summaries for the 1994 Symposium have not been received as of 20 June 1995)

2. SYMPOSIUM 1995

Thursday 23th March 1995

1200 - 1400 Poster Session

Very few members brought posters to the meeting. It was generally felt however, that as a way of keeping ENOP members in touch with what their colleagues were doing, that this was good idea. It was felt that next year we should all make sure to bring a poster, and avail of the opportunity to enter into dialogue with our colleagues.

SYMPOSIUM 1995

'Building New Competencies for W/O Psychologists'

(Report by Rene Bouwen)

This report does not intend to give an exhaustive account of the symposium, however, it is intended as an 'aide-memoire' for participants to recapture some of the essential themes that were discussed, and to provide report on the exchange of ideas that took place. It is written from the perspective of an engaged participant observer. In that way it should be considered as an invitation to all participants to construct or remember their own accounts.

The points of departure:

Gunella Westlander, Peter Dachler and Rene Bouwen took up the challenge to respond to the interests expressed at the end of the 1994 symposium to organize a workshop around the 'new scientific and professional demands for W/O psychologists and the required new competencies'. They met in St Gallen, Leuven and Paris to deal with the difficult task of defining a workable focus, that could be a challenging, but facilitating learning path for all. New developments are constantly taking place, and can be seen from different perspectives: practitioners have to deal with more turbulent and changing environments; new paradigm approaches with interdisciplinary and qualitative research begin to emerge, and new roles and contexts for young practitioners put severe demands on their competencies as professionals.

In planning the symposium, it was decided to begin from developments in the theory and practice of W/O psychology. Three domains: performance management; the contexts of working life; and learning in organizations; would be reviewed briefly by dialoguing partners as examples of ongoing new approaches. Then the community would try to formulate some key themes and possible consequences.

Part one: Setting the stage: are there new developments?

Gunella Westlander introduced the idea that what students and practitioners strongly need is the capability to work with 'application contexts'. All knowledge in W/O psychology is situated in a context of being meaningful and useful. In the context of health prevention, for example, organizations often allow only

secondary prevention, while young practitioners aspire to do primary prevention. How can students deal with the tension that arises from working in a renowned corporation which is at once stating its goals to be very humanistic, yet actually aims for purely materialistic goals? In each definition of a problem to be studied or analyzed, there is an implicit assumption of values. The problem definition itself is therefore a necessary element of the practitioner's work. Context problems always demand a multidisciplinary approach. An important question is then an awareness of the status of knowledge based on empirical data. This leads into epistemological issues.

Peter Dachler illustrates this necessity for epistemological awareness, which is prevalent in other social sciences, but not at all yet in psychology. Our theories and research findings are mostly discussed as if we are in the business of discovering facts and objectively given regularities, and we don't realize or discuss that our 'data' are the consequences of our own creation of being in relationships with all the stakeholders involved in a particular context. The methodological individualism cuts off this essentially relational quality of social reality. We often take for granted our relationship as experts or administrators, not realizing the influence on 'the facts' we create during the interaction. Working with this awareness requires specific epistemological and relational competencies.

Rene Bouwen mentions the study of grievance conflict in organizations as a fertile ground to illustrate the principles of a 'new paradigm' approach. 'I am right, you are wrong' is the self-evident statement of each party involved in a conflict. Research documents that sources of conflict can hardly ever be 'codified'. Instead of treating this ambiguity and complexity as a 'reliability' issue to be removed, we can consider multiperspectivism as the essence of the conflict. Then we can acknowledge in our research the generation of meaning and the shaping of relationships in each interaction among conflicting actors.

Pol Coetsier presented the results and conclusions of a personal telephone survey, he carried out among a group of practising W/O psychologists, as preparation for a lecture at the IAAP-conference in Madrid last summer. The main question he asked these psychology alumni was: what kind of theory, concepts or knowledge in broad terms do you use in your daily practice? He got generous collaboration from his subjects for this question and a large variety of confronting and provocative answers. They hardly ever read on a

regular base any scientific journal from the W/O psychology field. Their source of information was popular business literature and magazines. They stated that the research reports give too fragmented results, which can hardly ever be used. In their information search they seek to find the global picture to in order to understand the complexities of organizations, and the ongoing changes in employee and work contexts and social environments. But they also look for so-called practical guidelines and quick fixes, in their direct environments. Here we see also a strong need for contextual understanding and relational mastery, but also a lack of understanding what social science can contribute for them.

In a first discussion round, several participants expressed their perspective on the issues raised. Are these issues really novel? Are we not dealing with them already for a long time? Can raising these epistemological issues lead us somewhere? Is there an alternative to just doing careful research and increasing the reliability and validity of our measurements? Is it possible to transcend the individual as unit of analysis without abolishing the core of the psychological approach? Are societal changes really so dramatic that we can't integrate them into our traditional ways of doing research? Is this so-called new approach not the same as taking a frame of reference point of view, when you describe social phenomena as a researcher?

Part two: Reviewing and dialoguing about three key domains: organizational performance; working life context; learning. Organizational Performance

Frank Blackler and Peter Dachler exchanged views on new approaches for doing organizational research. Contrasting modern rationalism, contemporary capitalism, a functionalist view on organizations and an image of individual expertise, with a dualistic Cartesian approach, he developed an alternative approach grounded in 'socially distributed activity system' analysis. Instead of the individual the activity system becomes the unit of analysis. The Russian psychologist Vigotsky is an important source of inspiration here: psychological and social processes can only be understood by an appreciation of the culturally provided factors that mediate them. People develop shared perceptions on the activities they are doing by interacting through language. Discourse analysis can be a method of documenting activities through language. Knowing and acting are connected and the collective, situated and tentative nature of knowing is emphasized. Performance management can be viewed then as the ability to learn to work in new ways. Developing becomes more important than measuring. The

new image of knowing and expertise is embodied, embedded, embrained and encultured.

A discussion developed to question the necessity for a broader unit of analysis. The analysis of active and latent errors at the level of the individual, for instance, takes into account also the disruptions through new technologies. This activity systems approach and the underlying constructionist principles were felt by some participants not to capitalize enough on the existing attainments in W/O psychology. 'Are you saying that we have to start all over again? Was it then useless what we have been doing? The added value for practice of this proposed approach was questioned. It is probably not a question of, either this (tradition) - or that (new paradigm), but rather discovering, the complementarities could be a joint task for the scholars involved. After some subgroup work on what we liked and disliked a wide variety of ideas and appreciations were expressed. Some reactions can be grouped under the heading puzzlement, degree of anger, 'this is an inimical message for the whole field', or 'old wine in new bottles'. There were even some zealous attempts to convince everyone that this is another perspective. Another reaction was the question about the hidden values behind the statements. It could be seen as post modern ideology. The content topic (performance) was not dealt with enough and the example could hardly be seen as requiring a new approach or paradigm. Existing frames take care of the expressed concern. Is the idea of 'frame of reference' not enough to state what has to be stated. Is it not first year philosophy to say that what 'is' is what is 'seen as'. Also some recognition of the idea of multi-perspectivism was expressed, but 'do we need to make such a strong point out of it'? Some recognized the need for a different unit of analysis than the individual. The necessity for meta- rules to come to a form of communication was appreciated.

Context of Working Life

David Guest, in interaction with Gunnela Westlander, told the story of a large scale effort to increase employee involvement in a bureaucratic organization. An intervention target group was compared with a control group and no change or even a slight deterioration of employee climate was observed. To understand what happened the context frame had to be broad and the relationships had to be considered over the long term. The organization could not be conceived here as a given reality, but in searching further it became clear how this organizational environment is socially perceived, constructed and negotiated continuously. A second example that illustrated the legitimacy of broadening the context scope was a study on hiring and retaining high potential

staff. The social negotiation process between actors is very important here. A re-appraisal of the context by the people involved is continuously going on.

A lively discussion followed about alternative approaches and implications for research and intervention. Can intervention be separated from research? Each research encompasses some intervention, so you can never have a pure research logic approach in a social context. One can of course question whether commitment was the proper variable to study here, but there will be always some necessity to include the context of the research. You are always part of it also as a researcher. There is an important capability here of 'learning the craft' to be involved in an organizational context. It requires a variety of intellectual, relational and experiential competencies. Another conclusion was that 'the context has always to be included'. Taking a systems perspective can facilitate interfacing the focal stimulus of research and the context. Also the different parties have to be identified. Continuing attention to the process is necessary to deal with the relational aspects.

Learning in Organizations

Jose-Maria Prieto illustrated the learning process on the individual level. Different text types can be distinguished from learner controlled to instructor controlled. Learning strategies for learner controlled contexts should have the following characteristics: -expose the students to an active process of knowledge construction -explore multiple perspectives: few issues have a single correct resolution -embed learning in problem solving contexts and in social interactions -Gain some control over daily problems by producing relevant questions and knowledge

- Map out a repertoire of multiple modes of representation
- Understand that knowledge is a personal and social construct for the time being.

These social constructionist principles can guide the development of rich learning contexts.

Rene Bouwen illustrated learning in social situations, mainly in circumstances of change and innovation in organizations.

A first example documents the conditions for team innovations in a counselling service. These circumstances are: small group, open contact, thrust, being listened to, open communication, being valued and experience recognition. In a service organizations, what makes people learn is: getting attention, knowing when and whereto ask questions, getting reaction, getting feedback, being supported, have someone

to talk to, experience tolerance for failure. In an organizational social climate change project a process of co-inquiry was set up with the employees. Five development tasks can be distinguished which describe the innovation path: discovering and describing the interpretive repertoires, pointing after similarities and differences, closely watching the quality of the relationship among the actors, 'de-reification' of defined issues through bringing in variation and finally developing a common script.

These three examples describe the qualities of a process of social construction as a negotiated order among the parties involved. Knowledge in organizations is always perspectivistic and it is the expression of a community of language. Knowledge and meaning is always contextualized within a specific community of meaning. Social construction is by definition interactive through a process of dialoguing. Finally social construction is always relationally embedded. These are the core characteristics of the social construction process. They can be documented in a co-inquiry process and they can be used as design and coaching principles, but they can not be engineered into the process from the outside.

Part Three: Implications for New Competencies: subgroup work and plenary dialogue, facilitated by Stephen Fineman.

After some subgroup work in three domains (practice, teaching and research) on the question about relevancy for thinking about new competencies, a variety of opinions was expressed.

Concerning Research and Practice:

The traditional distinctive competencies for A/O psychologists have to be reinforced: skills in observing, measuring and interpreting and the focus on the individual. Having a variety of competing models about behaviour and organization and multiple ways of viewing things can be an enrichment. Skills for reading contexts have to be included (cultural, historical, technical). Maybe also 'marketing' skills to sell their ideas better. Some people would like to call these processual or communication skills to deal with relationships in direct contact with clients and research subjects in all contexts. Epistemological skills were also mentioned to be able to question assumptions and to recognize mindsets or paradigms or vocabularies from which issues are framed in social contexts. A wide variety of inquiry skills from different methodological backgrounds could reinforce the practitioner's position.

Concerning Teaching:

A discussion emerged whether teaching should be 'concept driven', 'problem driven' or 'context and experience driven'? Also the personal integration (self reflection, personal valuing, integrity) of the student can get special attention. Depending on the stage of learning a different mix of approaches can be used. Learning to appreciate differences and to work with differences can be a most valuable skill for a social scientist in the challenging times ahead of us. These different accents in the learning process are very well expressed in Kolb's learning cycle (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation). A good W/O psychology curriculum uses probably a balance of inputs on all learning processes and styles.

Developments in neighbouring fields were stressed by some people as very important. Also expressive skills, which have to do a lot with language mastery and creativity give a substantial grounding in processes of meaning making and meaning communication. This is at the heart of the work of psychology in practice.

An openness and critical evaluation of new paradigm approaches enhances largely the intellectual strength of students and practitioners. Being able to see multiple perspectives and untangle the language games going on in organizations should be a critical skill for those involved in change management and consultation.

A Personal Conclusion

The presenters wanted to invite the ENOP members to consider the characteristics of a new paradigm approach and to look into the implications for training and research. There was a broad recognition that the context of behaviour has to be taken into account and that different parties have different frames of reference. Some people estimate that this is possible within the positivist paradigm; it is just an extension of the scope and the flexibility of behaviour in work and organization contexts.

The point that was less taken or understood was the essential relational character of all human activity. When people think, talk or act, they always engage in and shape relationships with their co-actors. This is going beyond the cognitive view. Language is then not a representation but an enactment of the world. There is a continuous shaping of relationships (influence, cooperation, trust, etc..), which is at the heart of behavioral sciences. Only interpretive and dialogical approaches can catch this relational aspect. Organizational behaviour is a continuous negotiation of the terms of relationships; it is a continuing internal and external alignment.

Including these negotiation processes in the scope of W/O psychology can be an asset to deal with the continuous transformations organizations are going through. Can W/O psychology reconsider its dominant focus on a positivist and functional approach to allow a parallel development of a social constructionist paradigm? Relational, contextual, epistemological, qualitative inquiry and integrative skills can extend then the professional repertoire of the W/O psychologist, who is up to now mainly acting from his intellectual competencies.

3. ENOP presence at Gyor

It was decided to ask the Gyor organisers to schedule a Panel Discussion of the Reference Model for this conference. This panel would be composed of those members of the Reference Model committee, and a number of practitioners would also be invited to participate.

4. Conferences

Tilburg: "Values and Work" 9-22 November, 1994

Guangzhou 27-31 August 1995 Chinese regional conference in Psychology. Contact: Bernard Wilpert

The Seventh EAWOP Conference will be held at Gyor in Hungary the 13th-17th April 1995 Contact person: Miklos Antalovits

Fourth European Conference of Psychology, Athens, July 2nd to 7th 1995. Contact: James Georgas, who invited us to attend the conference.

4th European Conference on Organisation Psychology and Health Care. Munich, October 12-15th 1995

Final Abstracts by 1st December 1994. Contact person Dr A Griffiths University of Nottingham, UK,

Fax 44 602 51 5324, or Dr G Wenninger TU Munich, Germany. Fax 49 89 2105 4202

5. Workshops

"Theoretical and practical approaches to event analyses"

Bad Homburg, Germany, 11-13 May, 1995

6. Library Project

The Library Project Planning is completed. It has been used by Gunn Johansson and Bernhard Wilpert in Sweden and Germany to raise money for the fund. Approaches have been made to the Institute of Scientific Information in Philadelphia to arrange that copies of 'Current Contents' be available for our

project. Funding possibilities also exist for a new project from the International Association for the Promotion of Co-operation with Scientists from independent states of the former Soviet Union, from the European Union. The question of distribution and control of books was also discussed.

It was decided to request the Maison des Sciences de L'Homme to order, purchase and pay for all books required under the Library programme for Eastern Europe. ENOP is to prepare a donor letter, an "Ex libris" sticker to be inserted in each book, to locate distribution centres and to draft a contract letter with the Director of each university stating the conditions of acceptance for the donation of books by ENOP to those universities.

Contract Letter

This contract letter should be drafted by Gunn Johansson and sent to donor agency in addition to the list of ENOP conditions.

7. Research

Moskou-Tilburg Joint Research project "Interruption in Informational Work" Coordinators: Anna Leonova, Rob Roe

Berlin -Budapest Joint research project: "Safety and human reliability in socio-technical systems of high complexity."

Coordinators: Bernard Wilpert and Miklos Antalovits

Liege, Moskou, Giessen and 8 other universities. Human error in high risk socio-technical systems."

Coordinator: Veronique de Keyser.

8. Publications

ENOP report number 1: "A dozen years in review"

ENOP Report number 2: "The ENOP Reference Model for Training in W/O Psychology."

ENOP Report number 3: "The ENOP Library project"

9. Membership

Branimir Sverko reported on progress in relation to new members. It was agreed that three of the ten potential members would be invited to attend the next symposium. They are: Eduard Konrand (Slovenia) Zofia Ratjczak (Poland) and Ivan Robertson (UK) Others were still in the process of replying and giving CV details.

He also brought to the attention of CoCo the fact that three existing members had not attended any events or contributed to ENOP activity during the past year. It was agreed that a letter reminding those people that ENOP is a small active network, and depends on members active contribution for its effectiveness.

10. BUDGET

No major changes are anticipated in the Budget allocation for this year.

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